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ABSTRACT

The results of a recent Harris poll, as reported by the Director of Research for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), suggest that the way people use television has changed: people who watch tend to do other things while watching. While this may be true of commercial television, the same poll indicated that viewers of public broadcasting programs pay more attention and are more involved in the programs. The CPB suggests that this is because the plots of many commercial television programs tend to be very predictable, while those of public broadcasting programs are not. Other polls reported by the Corporation indicate that since 1965, there has been a 23 percent increase in audience size for public broadcasting, with 38 percent of households interviewed having watched a public television station in the last week. A dramatic increase in public television viewing was found for minority groups--this is probably due to the fact that "Sesame Street" is beginning to penetrate into these households. Additional findings were that median hours watched per week increased from 1.5 to 1.9 percent, that public television viewers are more selective in their viewing, and that public television is seen as less biased than commercial stations. (SH)

Public Television: How Our Users See Us

October 18, 1971

Leroy Miller - Director of Research, CPB

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FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS THE CORPORATION HAS

TAKEN THIS FORUM TO TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT

RESEARCH EFFORTS OF THE CORPORATION OVER THE

PAST YEAR, BUT BEFORE WE TALK ABOUT NUMBERS,

I SHOULD LIKE TO REFRESH OUR RECOLLECTION

ABOUT OUR PERCEPTIONS OF AUDIENCE. AS WE HAVE

SAID SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST, WE ARE NOT

MERELY IN THE AUDIENCE DELIVERING BUSINESS.

AS WE TALK ABOUT AUDIENCE WE ARE MORE

CONCERNED WITH THE EFFECT, THE IMPACT, AND

THE PENETRATION THAT OUR PROGRAMMING HAS ON

VIEWERS AND WE SEEK TO INVOLVE OUR VIEWERS

IN OUR PROGRAMS.

I LIKE TO

CHARACTERIZE OUR PROGRAMMING EFFORTS AS

ADOPTING THE RIFLE APPROACH. IT CONCERNS

ITSELF WITH SPECIFIC TASTES AND INTERESTS OF ITS VIEWERS. IT DOES NOT SEEK IN ANY HOUR TO ATTRACT ALL OF THE POSSIBLE VIEWERS IN THE SIGNAL AREA, BUT RATHER TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY AND CREATIVE PROGRAMMING FOR SPECIAL TASTES AND INTERESTS. WHILE A GIVEN VIEWER'S TASTES AND INTERESTS MIGHT NOT BE SERVED ON SUNDAY NIGHT FROM 9 - 10 PM, HE MIGHT CHECK US OUT AGAIN ON TUESDAY NIGHT FROM 8 - 9 PM AND FIND SOMETHING THAT SUITES HIS TASTES AND INTERESTS.

FOR SOME TIME WE HAVE SUSPECTED THAT THE AVERAGE TELEVISION VIEWER IS USING TELEVISION IN A WAY DIFFERENTLY FROM THE WAY HE DID IN THE PAST. WHEN THE TELEVISION SET FIRST COMES INTO THE HOUSE THE TELEVISION

SET CONTROLS THE HOUSEHOLD. AFTER THE INITIAL
REALIZATION THAT A PICTURE AND SOUND COME
OUT OF THE BOX, THE HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS THEN
BEGIN TO ASK "SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?" SINCE
THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT THIS IS
WHAT A TELEVISION SET CAN DO THEN THEY START
TO SELECT FROM ANY OF THE VARIOUS CHOICES
BEING OFFERED. AFTER A WHILE, THE HOUSEHOLD
HAS PRETTY MUCH FIGURED OUT HOW MAT AND KITTY
ON GUNSMOKE ARE GOING TO REACT IN A GIVEN
SITUATION, ~~SO WHEN THEY DO IT,~~ THEY WATCH
WITH A REASONABLE DEGREE OF ATTENTIVENESS FOR
THE FIRST 3 or 4 MINUTES TO GET SOME IDEA OF
WHAT THE CONFLICT IS GOING TO BE THAT NIGHT,
AND MAYBE ANOTHER 8 to 10 MINUTES LATER IN
THE PROGRAM, THEY CHECK TO SEE WHAT, IF ANY,
Changes
~~EVENTS~~ IN THE PLOT, AND THEN MAYBE ANOTHER

10 to 15 MINUTES LATER THEY CHECK IT AGAIN
TO SEE HOW THE PROBLEM IS GOING TO BE RESOLVED
AND THEN ABOUT 4 MINUTES BEFORE THE SHOW IS
ENDED THEY WILL LOOK AGAIN TO SEE HOW THE
PROBLEM IS DEALT WITH.

THESE CHANGES IN THE WAY PEOPLE USE
TELEVISION ARE A FUNCTION OF THE PREDICTABILITY
OF IT. HOWEVER, WITH PUBLIC BROADCASTING
WHEN VIEWERS ARE WATCHING , LET'S SAY
"JULIA CHILDS" SHOWING YOU HOW TO PREPARE
COQ-AU-VIN, IF YOU TURN YOUR HEAD AWAY FROM
THE SET YOU MAY MISS HOW MUCH WINE TO PUT
INTO IT, HOW FREQUENTLY TO STIR IT, OR EVEN
HOW LONG TO COOK IT, SO THAT WHEN THE VIEWER
WATCHES PUBLIC TELEVISION HE BECOMES INVOLVED
IN THE PROGRAM. A VIEWER CAN NEVER PREDICT
HOW AN ENCOUNTER ON "FIRING LINE" WILL BE

RESOLVED OR WHAT "BIG BIRD" WILL DO NEXT,
OR GET HIMSELF A GLASS OF WINE IN THE MIDDLE
OF "NET PLAYHOUSE".

IN THE HARRIS SURVEY CONDUCTED DURING
THE FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER WE ASKED THE
2031 RESPONDENTS WHAT THEY DID WHEN THEY
WATCH TELEVISION. WHEN WATCHING COMMERCIAL
TELEVISION A LITTLE LESS THAN 6 OUT OF EVERY
10 EITHER OFTEN OR SOMETIMES LEAVES THE
TELEVISION SET ON EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE OUT
OF THE ROOM. HOWEVER, ONLY A LITTLE OVER
A THIRD OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS DO THAT.
PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS ARE LEAST LIKELY
(26-35%) TO WATCH TV WITHOUT INTERRUPTION
FOR AN ENTIRE EVENING - OR READ A MAGAZINE
WHILE VIEWING (23-35%). A LITTLE LESS THAN
A THIRD THINK THEY ARE WASTING TOO MUCH TIME

WHEN THEY ARE WATCHING COMMERCIAL TELEVISION
AS CONTRASTED WITH ONLY 14 PERCENT OF THE
PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS FEELING THAT WAY.
WHEN ASKED IF THEY REALLY GET ABSORBED IN
THE PROGRAMS COMMERCIAL TELEVISION VIEWERS
INDICATE (71%) THAT THEY OFTEN OR SOMETIMES
GET REALLY ABSORBED IN THE PROGRAM, BUT ONLY
66 PERCENT OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS
RESPOND THAT WAY.

I THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP
THIS FRAME OF REFERENCE IN MIND WHEN
TALKING ABOUT AUDIENCE.

IN STATING THIS PREMISE FIRST, THIS IS
NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE TWO MEASURES WE USED
LAST YEAR DO NOT INDICATE THAT OUR AUDIENCE
IS UP, INDEED IN 25 MARKETS MEASURED FOR

THE CORPORATION BY THE AMERICAN RESEARCH
BUREAU OUR AUDIENCE HAS GONE UP FROM 1970 to
1971 BY 11 PERCENT. AND, IN 19 MARKETS WHERE
WE HAVE COMPARABLE DATA GOING BACK TO 1965
OUR AUDIENCE HAS INCREASED BY 23 PERCENT.
LAST YEAR THE HARRIS STUDY INDICATED THAT
32 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS HE VISITED
WATCHED A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION IN THE
PREVIOUS WEEK. THIS YEAR THAT FIGURE HAS
INCREASED TO 38 PERCENT. NOT ONLY THAT,
IN 1970 NINETEEN PERCENT STATED THAT THEY
WATCHED A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION WITHOUT
ANY AID FROM THE INTERVIEWER, BUT THIS YEAR
THAT FIGURE GOES UP TO 28 PERCENT. THIS
INDICATES NOT ONLY A HIGHER LEVEL OF VIEWING
BUT A MORE SOLID IMPRESSION IN THE MINDS OF
OUR VIEWERS. WHEN WE LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHICS

THE MOST DRAMATIC SHIFT OCCURS IN THE
VIEWING OF BLACKS. IN 1970 THIRTY-FIVE
PERCENT OF THE BLACK HOUSEHOLDS HAD WATCHED
THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION. THIS
YEAR THAT FIGURE INCREASED TO 52 PERCENT.
WHEN WE THINK ABOUT OUR NATIONAL PROGRAMMING
FOR BLACKS AS BETWEEN 1970 AND 1971 THERE
WAS NO CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PROGRAM
OFFERINGS FOR THAT COMMUNITY SO I SUSPECT
THE INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF VIEWING IS
PROBABLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT "SESAME STREET"
IS BEGINNING TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT PENETRATION
IN BLACK HOUSEHOLDS. IN A STUDY CONDUCTED
IN EIGHT OF THE LARGEST CITIES AMONG A
SAMPLE OF 2400 BLACKS, WHEN WE ASKED RESPONDENTS
WHO HAD CHILDREN SIX OR UNDER WHICH PROGRAM

THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED 47 PERCENT OF THEM
NAMES "SESAME STREET". THE NEXT PROGRAM
MENTIONED RECEIVED A RESPONSE RATE FROM
10 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS. PARALLELING
THAT EFFORT WE CONDUCTED A STUDY AMONG
1400 SPANISH SPEAKING RESPONDENTS IN EASH T
HARLEM AND THE SOUTH BRONX IN NEW YORK,
WHICH ARE PREDOMINANTLY SPANISH SPEAKING
COMMUNITIES, SOME 54 PERCENT OF THESE
HOUSEHOLDS RECALLED "SESAME STREET" AS THE
PROGRAM THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED ON THEIR
LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION. BUT THEY
WERE SUBSEQUENTLY ASKED IF THEIR CHILDREN
WATCHED "SESAME STREET" 96 PERCENT OF THESE
HOUSEHOLDS INDICATED THAT THEY DO.

LAST YEAR SOME 37 PERCENT OF OUR VIEWERS

WATCHED US LESS THAN ONE HOUR A WEEK. THIS
YEAR THAT FIGURE GOES DOWN TO 30 PERCENT,
SO, NOT ONLY ARE MORE PEOPLE WATCHING US
BUT THEY ARE ALSO WATCHING US MORE
FREQUENTLY. THE MEDIAN HOURS INCREASED
FROM 1.5 to 1.9 PERCENT WITH THE MOST
DRAMATIC INCREASES OCCURING AMONG BLACKS,
WHO VIEW MORE PUBLIC TELEVISION THAN ANY
OTHER GROUP. ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE
SELECTIVITY OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS,
MORE SO, THAN ANY OTHER GROUP (37%), ALMOST
ALL OF THE TIME BEFORE THEY WATCH TELEVISION
THEY LOOK IN THE NEWSPAPER TO SEE WHAT IS ON,
AND ALMOST 9 PERCENT OF THEM SAY THAT ALMOST
ALL OF THE TIME THEY SELECT THEIR PROGRAMS
BY FLIPPING FROM CHANNEL TO CHANNEL.

WE ALSO ASKED THESE RESPONDENTS TO
COMPARE PUBLIC TELEVISION AND COMMERCIAL
TELEVISION AS TO WHETHER IT OFTEN PRESENTS
A BIASED POINT OF VIEW. YOUR STATIONS ARE
SEEN AS LESS BIASED (16%) THAN THE COMMERCIAL
STATION WHERE 42 PERCENT FEEL THAT IT IS
TRUE THAT THE COMMERCIAL STATIONS OFTEN
PRESENT A BIASED POINT OF VIEW. WHEN ASKED
TO RATE PUBLIC TELEVISION AS TO THE
QUALITY OF THE JOB THEY ARE DOING IN
PRESENTING FAIR AND UNBIASED DOCUMENTARIES
(43%) SAY THAT THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION
STATION IS DOING AN EXCELLENT OR PRETTY
GOOD JOB, WITH 37 PERCENT FEELING THAT ABOUT
THEIR LOCAL COMMERCIAL STATION. OF THE
TOTAL SAMPLE ONLY 7 PERCENT FEELS THAT THEIR
LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION TENDS TO

TO FAVOR A CERTAIN POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW
WITH 35 PERCENT SAY IT PRESENTS ALL POINTS
OF VIEW. A LITTLE MORE THAN ONE OUT OF
EVERY TWO FEELS THAT TELEVISION IN GENERAL
GIVES THEM ENOUGH OF A CHOICE AND VARIETY
OF DIFFERENT THINGS TO WATCH, 48 PERCENT OF
THE PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS FEEL THAT THEIR
LOCAL PTV STATION PROVIDES THEM WITH SUFFICIENT
CHOICES.

47 PERCENT OF THESE RESPONDENTS FEEL
THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS EITHER A
GREAT DEAL OR SOME CONTROL OVER WHAT IS
SHOWN ON PUBLIC TELEVISION BECAUSE OF THE
FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT.

DETAILED COPIES OF THE HARRIS 1971

REPORT AND THE ARB 1971 FINDINGS WILL BE

FORWARDED TO EACH STATION MANAGER SOMETIME
WITHIN THE NEXT TWO OR THREE WEEKS. WHILE
OUR FOCUS IN THESE REPORTS HAS BEEN ON
NATIONAL PROGRAMMING IF YOU FEEL WE MAY BE
ABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN ANY LOCAL RESEARCH YOU
MIGHT UNDERTAKE WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO RESPOND
TO ANY REASONABLE REQUESTS YOU MAY HAVE.

MUCHAS GRACIAS.....